DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 255 427 SO 016 314

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TITLE Evaluating Economics Journal Publication: Perceptions of the Department Head.
PUB DATE Jul 83
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Economic Association (58th, Seattle, WA, July 23, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Economics Education; Educational Research; *Evaluation Criteria; *Faculty Evaluation; Higher Education; Promotion (Occupational); *Publications; *Scholarly Journals; Tenure

ABSTRACT

Questionnaires concerning the importance of publication in professional journals were sent to 193 university economics department heads. There was a 60 percent response rate. Questions were asked about: (1) the necessity of publications for appointment and promotion, (2) how department heads rate the various journals in terms of prestige accrued by professors publishing in them, (3) how department heads perceive the relative difficulty of publishing in various journals, (4) how journal articles are evaluated, and (5) the relative weights of factors used in evaluating journal authorship. Results indicated a great emphasis on publication, particularly in high prestige journals believed to have a low acceptance rate. Concern was expressed over the fact that perceived rates of acceptance in those prestigious journals were not correlated with actual rates and were often much lower than department heads believed. (IS)

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EVALUATING ECONOMICS JOURNAL PUBLICATION: PERCEPTIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT HEAD*

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SP 016 314

*Paper presented at the 58th Annual Western Economic Association Meeting, Seattle, WA July 23, 1983.

EVALUATING ECONOMICS JOURNAL PUBLICATION: PERCEPTIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT HEAD

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Recognizing the pivotal role that the economics Department Head plays in evaluating faculty for appointment or promotion, this study focuses on an attempt to identify and analyze economics department heads' perceptions as they relate to the evaluation of journal authorship. The current study builds upon and is analyzed in conjunction with similar studies made by the authors over a decade ago.[1] There has been a continued interest in these studies[2] and there appears to be a need for an update, comparative analysis, and reevaluation of the role of journal publication and its evaluation by economics department heads in appointing and promoting faculty. This is especially the case when overwhelmingly economics department heads report that the role of publication has become more important in promotion and appointment decisions over the past decade (see Table I).

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[1]Robert K. Coe and Irwin Weinstock, "Evaluating Journal Publication: Perceptions Versus Reality," AACSB Bulletin, Vol. 6, No. 1 (October, 1969), pp. 23-37; R. Coe and I. Weinstock, "Editorial Policies of Major Economics Journals", The Quarterly Review of Economics and Business, Winter 1967, pp. 37-43; and R. Coe and I. Weinstock, "Publication Policies of Major Business Journals," Southern Journal of Business, January 1968, pp. 1-10.

[2]See for example a reference to "Editorial Policies of Major Economic Journals" in Yoke, Gary W., "Current Publication Lags in Economic Journals," Journal of Economic Literature, Vol. XVIII (September 1980), pp. 1050-1055.

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Although other factors such as teaching, university and community service, and personal characteristics, may be important factors in determining faculty rewards, scholarly research resulting in journal publication may be the primary single factor in evaluating faculty for appointment or promotion in leading economics departments.

THE STUDY

In order to identify and analyze economics department heads' perceptions as they relate to the evaluation of journal authorship, data were obtained from a questionnaire sent to economics department heads in universities throughout the U.S. Questionnaires were sent to 193 economics department heads whose programs were in universities selected from the 1980-81 Membership Directory of the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). Responses were received from 116 (60%) department heads. These responses provide relevant data about the extent to which publication is perceived to be required for promotion, and how journal authorship is evaluated at these schools.

The aspects of the process of evaluating journal authorship that are analyzed are: (1) To what exte t publication is necessary for appointment and promotion in leading economics departments? (2) How do economics department heads rate the various journals in terms of the reflected achievement of a professor who has an article accepted for publication in a journal? (3) How does the department head perceive the relative difficulty of publishing in various journals? (4) In what manner are journal articles evaluated? (5) What are the relative weights of factors used in evaluating journal authorship?

PUBLICATION AND APPOINTMENT AND PROMOTION POLICIES

Economics department heads overwhelmingly (89%) report that the role of publication has become more important in appointment or promotion decisions over the last decade (See Table I). Only three percent reported that publication was less important than a decade ago with nine percent reporting no change. Some department heads reported that as their universities moved from local to regional or national prominence that publication became more important. Others indicated that some criteria for appointment or promotion that were formerly not thought of in terms of publication are now being interpreted to mean publication, e.g., a criterion requiring "recognition off-campus." There was also some indication that research was the major criterion for promotion even where policies stated that teaching was the major criterion. It is clear that publication is a major factor in appointment and promotion decisions in economic departments throughout the U.S.

TABLE I

HAS THE ROLE OF PUBLICATION BECOME MORE OR LESS IMPORTANT IN APPOINTMENT AND PROMOTION DECISIONS OVER THE PAST DECADE

	No. N=116	Percent
More Important	103	89%
Less Important	3	3%
No Change	10	9%

In 1969, 12 percent of economics department heads reported that publication was not necessary for promotion to any position in their schools. The 1982 results show only two department heads (less than 2%) so indicating. There appears to be increasing numbers of schools requiring publications for appointment or promotion especially for the department head's and dean's positions (see Table II). In 1969 only 35 percent of economics department heads said that publication was necessary for appointment or promotion to the position of department head; this increased to 58 percent in 1982, a 66 percent increase. There was an even more dramatic increase of 108% in the case of dean's position with half of the 1982 respondents saying that publication was necessary for appointment to the dean's position as opposed to only 24% so indicating in 1969.

TABLE II

IS PUBLICATION REQUIRED FOR APPOINTMENT OR PROMOTION?

	Percent Answering Yes		
	1969	1982	%Change
Rank or Position	N=71	N=116	1969-1982
Assistant Professor	29	40	+38
Associate Professor	83	92	+11
Professor	86	96	+12
Department Head	35	58	+66
Dean	24	50	+108

In the professorial ranks the major change since 1969 was at the assistant professor's level with 38 percent more department heads in 1982 indicating that publication was necessary for appointment or promotion to the position of assistant professor. There was some indication that where publication was not required for appointment as an assistant professor, it was a necessity for promotion to associate professorship. Nearly all the department heads (96 percent) reported that publication was necessary for appointment or promotion to a professorship with almost as many (92 percent) so indicating for the associate professor's level.

Many economics departments are located in liberal arts schools as opposed to business schools. One study indicated that over half (57 percent) of economics departments are located in their university's school of business as opposed to the college of liberal arts.[3] The current study found that some economics department heads located in schools of behavioral or social sciences or liberal arts felt that their publication requirements were more demanding than those in their universities' schools of business.

With publication becoming an ever more crucial factor in faculty appointments and promotions, the analysis of the means of evaluating such efforts is of special significance. Publication can take many forms and may reflect varying degrees of intellectual capacity and/or contributions to the field of knowledge. Many feel academic administrators (e.g., department heads) play the "numbers game," i.e., rewarding quantity virtually without regard to quality. The use of any evaluative system, other than the number

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[3]Robert K. Coe, "Economics Department: An Analysis of Administrative Locations and Undergraduate Majors," Collegiate News and View, Vol. XXIV, No. 2 (December 1970), p. 5.

of publications, implies criteria for evaluating publications. Are such criteria used? How are publications, such as journal articles, evaluated?

EVALUATION OF JOURNAL ARTICLES

Several sources of information or strategies are available to the department head when in the process of evaluating journal articles. This study focused on the following major sources or factors that might be used by the department head in evaluating journal publications:

1. A careful study of the article.
2. Comments of colleagues in the discipline.
3. Journal in which the article appears.
4. Relevance to the author's field of specialization.
5. Nature of the article (theoretical, policy, case study).
6. Nature of research (empirical, literature, armchair).

Economics department heads were asked to rank these sources or factors in terms of the importance of these factors in the evaluation of an article authored by a faculty member. The responses to this question for 1969 and 1982 are shown in Table III.

The current (1982) study clearly shows that the "journal in which published" is the single most important factor used in evaluating journal publication. In 1969 this was the second most important factor; however, when the 1969 data were isolated for schools with Ph.D. programs, the "journal in which published" became the most important factor. Economics department heads are clearly saying that they rely upon "journal in which published (prestige of the journal)" to be the major determinant in their evaluation of their faculties' journal publications.

TABLE III

RANKING OF SOURCES OR FACTORS
INFLUENCING THE DEPARTMENT HEAD'S
EVALUATION OF JOURNAL ARTICLES
1969 AND 1982

FACTOR	RANKING OF FACTOR* 1969	1982
Comments of Colleagues	1	2
Journal in which published	2	1
Relevance to the author's field of specialization	3	5
Careful study of article (by department head)	4	3
Nature of Article	5	6
Nature of Research	6	4

*Each respondent was asked to assign a weight to each factor. The factor with the greatest weight was ranked 1st, the second highest weight was ranked 2nd, etc.

The second most important factor used by economics department heads in evaluating journal publications is "comments of colleagues"; in 1969 this factor was ranked most important. There appears to have been a slight shift in the last decade away from "comments of colleagues" to the "journal in which published" as a major factor influencing economics department heads in evaluating journal publication. This makes it more important than ever for faculty members to consider carefully to which journal their rsearch is submitted for publication

A significant lessening of reliance on the factor "relevance to the author's field of specialization" seems to have taken place between 1969 (when it was ranked third) and 1982 (when it was ranked fifth). Some department heads commented that more of their faculty were involved in interdisciplinary research and publication and co-authoring articles with non-economists. The typical faculty member might be better rewarded now than in the past for researching with faculty outside of the economist's area of specialization.

The other change in this area was that economics department heads report giving more weight in 1982 to "nature of research" (ranked fourth) than in 1969 when they ranked this factor sixth. There was a tendency to be more concerned about the nature of the research but in terms of the faculty member's professional development and how this research supported the department's programs and activites. Some department heads reported an emphasis on empirical research, others theoretical and still others on policy issues. In other words, the faculty members' research and journal publications were evaluated not only on their own merits but also in conjunction with how well these activities fit into the development of the department

Written responses, although few in number, definitely favored theoretical articles but there was an indication that most of the journal research was based upon empirical research. The most important factor for consideration in journal authorship remains a matter of getting the article into a prestigious journal.

JOURNAL RATINGS

With the prestige of the journal being such an important factor in evaluating journal publications, the economics department head's subjective evaluations of various journals become a central factor. Both in 1969 and 1982 economics department heads were asked to "rate the achievement of the author of an article appearing in each of the following journals." The mean achievement ratings reflecting the relative merit of publishing in selected economics journals are shown in Table IV. Because "the journal in which published" is the most important factor in evaluating journal publications it is important to see how the economics department heads ranked the economics journal.

TABLE IV

ESTIMATED AND ACTUAL ACCEPTANCE RATES AND MEAN ACHIEVEMENT RATINGS FOR SELECTED ECONOMICS JOURNALS 1669 and 1982

	Mean Achievement Rating[a]		Mean Perceived Rates(%)[b]		Actual Acceptance Rates	
	1982	1969	1982	1969	1982[c]	1969[d]
American Economic Review	8.7	8.8	11	10	15	9
Econometrica	8.6	8.5	12	18	20	40
Quart. Journ. of Economics	8.1	8.6	14	15	12	n/a
Review of Econ. & Stat.	7.9	8.4	15	16	15	27
Jour. of Econ. Literature	7.8	n/a	18	n/a	n/a	n/a
Jour. of Am. Stat. Assoc.	7.6	7.8	16	21	15	30
Jour. of Finance	7.3	5.9	16	31	15	20
Southern Econ. Journ.	6.9	6.3	17	29	15	20
J. of Econ. History	6.8	7.1	21	29	15	15
International Econ. Review	6.7	7.3	18	28	n/a	65
Economic Inquiry	6.4	4.6	19	39[a]	n/a	n/a
Canadian J. of Econ.	6.3	6.8	19	28	20	20
Econ. Dev. & Cultural Change	6.3	5.7	23	31	<40	15
Jour. of Business	6.3	4.8	22	35	<40	15
Jour. of Regional Science	6.2	5.2	21	36	25	5
Ind. & Labor Rel. Review	6.0	5.6	22	34	n/a	27
Land Economics	6.0	5.3	21	36	<12	40
Amer. Jour. of Agric. Econ.	5.9	5.0	21	35	n/a	40
Quart. Review of Econ & Bus	5.6	4.3	24	39	<10	23
Business History Review	4.7	4.6	24	39	n/a	20
Jour. of Econ. Education	4.3	n/a	31	n/a	15	n/a
Economic Georgraphy	4.3	n/a	25	n/a	n/a	n/a
American Economist	3.4	n/a	29	n/a	25	n/a
AVERAGE FOR ALL JOURNALS	6.4	6.1	19.5	30	15.5	26

[a]Each respondent ranked each journal on a scale of highest reflected authorial achievement (value of "9") to lowest reflected authorial achievement (value of "0").

[b]Mean estimates of Economics Department Heads.

[c]As reported in David W. E. Cabell, Directory of Publishing Opportunities in Business Administration and Economics, Second Edition, (Beaumont, Texas, Cabell Publishing Co., 1981).

[d]As reported by journals.

Economics department heads have been very consistent in ranking journals between 1969 and 1982. Data in Table IV show that most journals maintained their respective rankings with the exception of Economic Inquiry (formerly Western Economics Journal) and the Journal of Finance both of which moved up significantly in their ranking. There were large variations, however, in rankings assigned to any one journal. Only the American Economic Review (AER) had consistently high rankings with only one department head ranking the AER below an "8" on a "9" to "0" scale. All other journals were typically ranked between "9" and "3". It is clear that different department heads have different hierarchies of perceived achievement when evaluating various journals.[4]

It was hypothesized that the economics department head would generally relate high achievement for journal authorship in journals with low acceptance rates and vice versa. This hypothesis was clearly confirmed with a highly significant +.94 coefficient of rank correlation (Spearman's),[5] where the journals' achievement rank was correlated with the same journals' acceptance rate rank, both as perceived by the economics department head (1982). Whatever their logic, economics department heads apparently

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[4]Economics department heads were asked to list any other economics journals that would reflect high achievement. The four most frequently mentioned journals with their achievement ratings are (1982):

Journal	Achievement Ratios (No. of Dept. Heads rating in parenthesis)	Number of Department Heads Responding
Jour. of Political Econ.	8.3 (36)	36
Economic Journal	8.8 (28)	31
Jour. of Econ. Theory	7.8 (13)	20
Jour. of Law and Econ.	7.0 (14)	20

[5]All correlations used in this study were Spearman's and all tests of significance were at the 1% level.

consistently associate a journal's merit with its perceived acceptance rate (high merit with low acceptance rate and vice versa). This phenomenon was identical with that revealed in the 1969 study. The department heads have been very consistent in their relating perceived merit with perceived difficulty in publication (acceptance rates), but how do these perceptions of acceptance rates correspond with reality?

The perceived acceptance rate ranks of journals were correlated with their actual acceptance rate ranks - 1982 (see Table IV). The resulting Spearman's coefficient of rank correlation is -.16, which is too small to be statistically significant. The hypothesis that there is a significant correlation between actual and estimated acceptance rates would have to be rejected. Again, economics department heads have been consistent in this regard since 1969 as that study indicated similar results.

Economics department heads did correctly perceive a reduction in the acceptance rate for the typical economics journal between 1969 and 1982. Data in Table IV shows that the actual average acceptance rate for the selected economics journals declined from 26 percent to 15.5 percent between 1969 and 1982. Department heads' estimated average acceptance rates declined from 30 percent to 19.5 percent during this same period.

The range of estimates on any economic journal's acceptance rate is surprisingly high (see Table V). The smallest range of 47 percentage points was for the American Journal of Agricultural Economics with a low estimated acceptance rate of 3 percent and a high of 50 percent. The largest range of 85 percentage points was for Econometrica with as low estimate of 5 percent and a high estimate of 90 percent. It is clear that there is a wide variance in the perceptions of acceptance rates of leading economics journals among economics department heads. Further, many department heads said they

TABLE V

ESTIMATED ACCEPTANCE RATES

Journal	Mean Est. Acceptance Rate	Mean, Hi-Low, and Range 1982 Low-Hi Est. Acceptance Rate	Range of Est. Acceptance Rate
American Economics Rev.	15	2-60	58
Econometrica	20	5-90	85
Quart. Journ. of Economcis	12	4-80	76
Review of Econ and Stat	15	4-80	76
Jour. of Econ. Literature	n/a	2-60	58
Jour. of Am. Stat. Assoc.	15	5-60	55
Jour. of Finance	15	8-70	62
Southern Econ. Jour.	15	2-70	68
Jour. of Econ. History	15	3-80	77
International Econ. Review	n/a	3-70	67
Economic Inquiry	n/a	2-70	68
Canadian Jour. of Econ.	20	3-70	67
Econ. Dev. & Cult. Change	8	2-80	78
Jour. of Business	8	5-85	80
Jour. of Regional Science	25	4-80	76
Ind. & Labor Rel. Review	n/a	1-60	59
Land Economics	10	2-60	58
Amer. Jour. of Agric. Econ.	n/a	3-50	47
Quart. Rev. of Econ & Bus	8	2-50	48
Business History Review	n/a	1-80	79
Jour. of Econ. Education	15	1-70	69
Economic Georgraphy	n/a	2-60	58
American Economist	25	5-70	65

had no idea what the acceptance rates were for leading economics journals. With the importance attached to journal publication in the economics profession, it is imperative that the economics department heads and faculty members better inform themselves on the relative difficulty of publishing in leading economics journals.

SUMMARY

1. Economics department heads overwhelmingly believe that publication is required for promotion or appointment to associate or full professor. Half or more believe it is also required for the department head's and dean's positions. Over half believe that publication is not required for appointment or promotion to an assistant professorship, but further promotion would require publication. The numbers of department heads believing that publication is required for promotion or appointment to professorial or administrative positions have significantly increased since 1969, especially for the assistant professor's, department head's, and dean's positions.

2. Nearly all department heads stated that the role of publication in promotion and appointment decisions has become more important over the last decade. Only 3 of 116 respondents felt a lesser role of publications in these decisions.

3. Economics department heads feel that the most important factor used in evaluating journal publication is "journal in which published". This factor was only the second most important in 1969; however, at that time it was the most important factor for Ph.D. granting institutions. Other important factors are "comments of colleagues" and "careful study of the article (by the department head)." Between 1969 and 1982 there has been less importance attached to the factor "relevance to the author's field of

specialization," as more recognition is given to economists who co-author articles and do research with colleagues in non-economics areas.

4. Economics department heads have correctly perceived an increased difficulty (lower acceptance rates) in achieving journal authorship since 1969. However, they continue to generally perceive journal acceptance rates to be higher than they are and furthermore there still is no correlation between perceived acceptance rates and actual acceptance rates.

5. There is an extremely wide variation in the estimates of acceptance rates of leading economics journals on the part of economics department heads. In fact many indicate they have no idea what these acceptance rates might be or that there is a large amount of guesswork in their estimates.

6. There is a high correlation between the difficulty of publishing in economics journals (acceptance rates) and the reflected achievement of publishing in thos journals (prestige). This relationship is similar to that found in 1969; whatever their logic, economics department heads associate high achievement with publication in a journal with a low perceived acceptance rate. This causes some concern when it has consistently been shown (1969-1982) that the perceived acceptance rates are not generally correlated with actual acceptance rates.

7. The overriding consideration in journal authorship in terms of appointment or promotion to professional or administrative positions seems to be mainly a matter of having the article accepted for publication in the most prestigious journal possible.